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# Practice What You Preach? The Role of Rural NGOs in Women's Empowerment

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**Practice What You Preach? The Role of Rural NGOs in Women's Empowerment**

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If NGO employees are facilitating change for self-empowerment, such behavior must be modeled for successful transmission as suggested in self-efficacy models of behavior change. Rural NGOs in India often depend on employees of the local population who are as likely to be marginalized as their clients. This may cause a gap between what the employees may be trained to 'preach' and what they 'practice', thereby diminishing their effectiveness. We examine the employees of a successful rural NGO in India to establish if this gap exists. Using three empowerment instruments, we find that employees indeed 'walk the talk'.

Keywords: NGOs, Empowerment Index, India, Women  
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## Practice What You Preach? The Role of Rural NGOs in Women's Empowerment Introduction

Since the 1980's the Government of India has shown increasing concern for women's issues through a variety of legislation promoting the education and political participation of women (Collier, 1998). International organizations like the World Bank and the United Nations have also focused on women's issues, especially the empowerment of poor women in rural areas. Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have moved beyond the traditional focus of women's health and education to addressing the underlying causes of deprivation through the promotion of economic and social empowerment (Narayan, 2002; Sadik, 1988).

There are many challenges that face NGOs who make it their goal to empower women (Carr, 2000; Malhotra & Mather, 1997; Mayoux, 2001; Mosedale, 2005; Narayan, 2002; Nussbaum, 2000). This paper addresses one specific challenge that is faced by NGOs located in rural areas - access to skilled social workers. Rural NGOs, who have to find employees from the same local pool of individuals from which they get their clients, find it difficult to promote empowerment effectively (Goyder, 2001). For rural NGOs to be successful, they must attract employees who are relatively more empowered than their clients. These employees must have credibility with their marginalized clients to alter their ways of thinking on many long-standing traditional issues, such as dowries, child labor, and patriarchal subjugation.

Self-efficacy is one of the four most commonly cited constructs for behavioral change (Whitlock, Orleans, Pender, & Allan, 2002). Though the purpose and perspective of this literature on self-efficacy differs, it centers largely on behavioral change and Practice What You Preach 3

related health outcomes, it can be brought to bear on issues of empowerment. Self-efficacy determines when an individual will undertake new behaviors such as self-empowerment. Women's low self-efficacy in rural India often stems from the limited and disadvantaged positions they have in society. This makes any behavior change difficult if it merely relies on verbal persuasion to make women change their ways and take control of their own lives and the future of their children. The best way to acquire self-efficacy is to combine verbal persuasion with role modeling in a supportive and appreciative environment (Bandura, 1986).

As an example, NGO employees who model empowered behaviors are more likely to induce sustained behavior modification among other women towards self-empowerment. Despite the training given to employees to promote empowerment among their clients, there may still be a gap between what the employees 'preach' and what they 'practice' in their own lives. This may make them less effective and impede the NGO from achieving its goals (Farrington, Turton, & James, 1999).

In this paper, we study the employees at one NGO that is well regarded for its successes at promoting self-empowerment of rural and marginalized women. We examine whether its employees, who come from the same impoverished population as the clientele, are significantly different in their levels of empowerment than those they help. Is there a gap between the rhetoric and reality of empowerment among the employees? Are employees whose aim is to empower women, empowered themselves? In other words, do they practice what they preach?

### Literature Review

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To understand the changes women undergo in becoming empowered we look at the literature on behavior change and women's empowerment. In the first set of literature, we review factors that lead to successful change and in the second, we review what is understood as empowerment for women.

##### Behavior Change

Bandura (1986) suggests that a person's self-expectations determine whether certain behavior will be undertaken, the extent of effort expended by the individual, and whether the individual can persist in the face of challenges encountered. This notion of self-efficacy is mediated by a person's beliefs or expectations about his/her ability to achieve certain tasks effectively or exhibit certain behaviors (Hackett & Betz, 1981).

For example, individuals with low self-efficacy limit their participation when making difficult behavior changes and are more likely to give up when faced with obstacles. Their efficacy beliefs about themselves serve as barriers to change, and in this case, their own empowerment (Hackett & Betz, 1981). Furthermore, self-efficacy is not necessarily an in-born trait but can be acquired and nurtured (Hackett & Betz, 1981). This makes the concept of self efficacy particularly relevant to our study. Bandura (1986) identifies four ways in which self-efficacy and self-efficacy expectations are acquired: performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and physical/affective status.

Performance accomplishments are beliefs that stem from the reactions that individual accomplishments are greeted with. A positive assessment encourages self-efficacy beliefs and the expectation that similar behaviors will be well received in the future. Vicarious learning results in beliefs that are acquired by observing modeling

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change further enhances self-efficacy. Changes based on verbal persuasion, affective status and modeling behavior can lead to significant changes in self-belief and self-expectation. behaviors. When the modeling behavior is undertaken within similar contexts<sup>1</sup>, such as gender, economic and social class, it presents a realistic option. Verbal persuasion and affective status<sup>2</sup> also encourage self-efficacy. Persuading women to attempt positive behavior change and providing a supportive environment in which women can attempt

According to Bandura (1986) and Pajares (1996), changes in personal factors (such as self-efficacy) can affect individual behavior (willingness to take risks) and impact environmental factors (family and society). These relationships are reciprocal and reinforcing. This suggests that strategies which are purposefully introduced to enhance women's personal factors (self efficacy) can lead to reinforcing behaviors (such as self assertive behavior) which in turn can impact and reinforce environmental factors (such as alteration of familial relations).

##### Women's Empowerment

The effect of women's empowerment creates a powerful influence on family, community norms and values and finally the laws that govern these communities (Page & Czuba, 1999). Thus, women's empowerment is a vital strategy for development efforts. Although the notion of women's empowerment has long been legitimized by international development agencies (WorldBank, 2001), what actually comprises

1 In India, where this research is based, we include caste as a determinant of class for successful modeling behaviors. It is of little use for a woman of low social class to observe the success of a woman born to a family of high social standing with access to resources unavailable to the poor woman.

2 'Affective status' suggests that people learn best in a supportive environment, people do not easily learn in high stress situations, such as criticism.

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empowerment and how it is measured is still being debated. Malhotra, Schuler and Boender's (2002) excellent review of this debate highlights the many ways that empowerment can be measured and suggests that researchers pay attention to the process in which empowerment occurs.

The frequently used Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is an aggregate index made up of two dimensions: economic participation and decision-making (measured by the percentage of female administrators and managers, and professional and technical employees), and political participation and decision-making (measured by the percentage of seats in parliament held by women). For our purposes, GEM is a macro concept and does not capture a multidimensional view of an individual woman's empowerment. Furthermore, several studies suggest that women may be empowered in one area of life and not others (Hashemi, Schuler, & Riley, 1996; Kabeer, 1999; Kishor, 2000; Malhotra & Mather, 1997).

While we do not attempt to resolve this debate, we take the position that women's empowerment is 'the restoration to individuals of a sense of their own value and strength and their own capacity to handle life's problems' (Bush & Folger, 1994, p. 2). We believe it can be measured by the capacity to handle problems in each of the following spheres: personal, economic, familial, and political. We follow the literature and include household and interfamilial relations, a central locus of women's dis-empowerment in India (Batliwala, 1994; Bisnath & Elson, 1999; Datta, 2003; Mosedale, 2005; Narasimhan, 1999; Sen & Grown, 1987). By including political participation, we posit that women's empowerment measures should include women's participation in systemic transformation by engaging in political action.

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Amin, Becker and Bayes (1998) split the concept of women's empowerment into three components : the Inter-spouse Consultation Index, which seeks to represent the extent to which husbands consult their wives in household affairs; the Individual Autonomy Index which represents women's self-reported autonomy of physical movement outside the house and in matters of spending money; and the Authority Index, which reports on actual decision-making power (which is traditionally in the hands of the patriarch of the family). These indices are similar to those of used by Balk (1994).

Comparable components of empowerment are included in the eight indicators by Hashemi et al. (1996): mobility, economic security, ability to make small purchases, ability to make larger purchases, involvement in major decisions, freedom from domination by the family, political, and legal awareness, and involvement in political campaigning and protests. We construct four separate components of empowerment in Table 1 relying mostly on Hashemi et al. (1996), Amin et al. (1998), and Malhotra et al. (2002) as their work seems most relevant to the experiences of rural women in India.

<< Insert Table 1 here >>

The indicators in Table 1 measure women's empowerment more fully and in the broadest sense. The first set of questions we use represents the Personal Autonomy Index which measures a woman's independence from her spouse in making decisions regarding her physical movement outside the home and in spending some money on her own. Both activities are constrained to women living in traditional patriarchal systems of India. The second set of questions constructs an authority index, the Family Decision Making Index, to represent a woman's decision making power over some important aspects of family life generally undertaken by men in traditional patriarchal families. The third set of

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Following Amin et al.(1998), these questions were expressed as trichotomous options by design and are given different weights- 'generally' was assigned the value of 1, 'never' a value of 0, and 'occasionally' , an intermediate value of ½. For the Family decision making Index, 'wife alone' was assigned 1, 'joint decision' an intermediate score of ½, and 'husband alone' a score of zero.

questions, the Domestic Consultation Index, signifies the extent to which husbands consult their wives in household affairs. We supplement these questions by adding a Political Index. The questions embody a woman's political autonomy and awareness. Given that the legislation in India reserves special seats for women in elected bodies, even at the village level, an empowerment index for rural women should include her awareness of political issues and participation in the political process.

The reliability coefficients of all 4 sub-scales of empowerment ranged from 0.78 to 0.93. However, the four subscales significantly and strongly correlated (Pearson r from .65 to .76) indicating uni-dimensionality. Consequently, we used the empowerment index as a whole. The Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha reliability for the full empowerment index was .896.

Many factors have been found to influence empowerment indices. Mason (1986) points out that a woman's behavior varies across stages of the life cycle. As a woman grows older, experience can teach her to stand up for her own rights. As her children grow older and are less dependent on her, she can assert herself in the household without a threat to her children's well being. Over time and within traditional family structures, her sons get married and she is promoted from the comparatively obedient daughter-in-law to the role of mother-in-law and the one who must be obeyed.

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Control over money and other important household matters has been seen as a function of the family structure (Malhotra & Mather, 1997). Kishor (2000) suggests that women who live independently of their in-laws have greater agency to make choices which positively influences their level of empowerment. We expect that the influence of these family structures on empowerment will be such that women living in joint families with their in-laws will have less agency than those who live in a nuclear family structure. Of course this may be mitigated by age which dictates a woman's position in the joint family; the older the women the more likely she may be the ruling mother-in-law and fully able to control the decision making.

It has been argued that education is one of the most used indicators of empowerment. It has traditionally been used as a proxy for empowerment and is described as an enabling factor or source of empowerment (Chen, 1995; Kishor, 2000; Malhotra & Mather, 1997). Education does not have a positive linear relationship to

economic, social and political empowerment of women. It may be constrained by social and economic structures and gender relations (Jayaweera, 1997). Furthermore, empowerment includes cognitive and psychological elements, such as a women's understanding of her condition of subordination and the causes of such conditions. This requires an understanding of the self as well as the cultural and social expectations. Education may play a role in increasing this understanding (Jejeebhoy, 2000; Stromquist, 1995). Hence, although we expect that education will facilitate empowerment and be positively related to the empowerment index, it may be mitigated by other factors.

The duration of women's membership in NGO promoted credit programs is positively and significantly associated with indices of women's empowerment. This has Practice What You Preach 10

been explained by not only the financial contribution women make to their families, but also reinforced by their participation in NGO consciousness-raising efforts (Amin et al. 1998). Given that CRTC makes direct efforts at educating its clients and provides models of empowerment through its leadership and core values, we expect that association and the length of tenure with the NGO will affect a woman's empowerment index positively. Although education may be an enabling factor as suggested above, experience (of self and others) allows a woman to see that the lack of autonomy in her life choices as something that can be changed. We expect that the interventions made by the NGO for women in general give the employees the motivation to look at how and what changes can be made and the impetus to make changes in their own lives.

Thus, we expect several factors of influence: age, education, income, family structure, and the years spent at the NGO. Thus, we expect the Empowerment Index (E-Index) to be a function of age (A), family structure (FS), income class (IC), education (E), and tenure (T) at the NGO.

We use the equation  $E\text{-Index} = f(A, E, I, S, T)$  where: EI= Empowerment Index, an aggregate of four separate indices; E= Education (years of formal education), A= Age in years; I= income class (Binary variable 0= low income, 1= Middle income); S= family structure (Binary variable 0= nuclear, 1= Joint family); T =years of tenure at the NGO

#### Methods

We stipulated that the NGO to be studied must be a well established and successful grassroots organization that has the empowerment of women as its mission. It should have received attention for its success in empowering women in rural India both locally and internationally, and have a founder/director who was available to meet with Practice What You Preach 11

us and allow us to survey the employees. After searching The 1996 Directory of Organizations (India) and contacting several NGOs, we chose the Chinmaya Rural Training Center (CRTC) as it met our criteria. CRTC has received attention nationally and internationally; the director has received many awards for her work on the empowerment of rural women. CRTC has also been identified by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) as their 'flagship' NGO that dealt with women's empowerment (CIDA, 2000). Furthermore, CRTC was identified in 1998 by the Indian Government Agency of Agricultural and Rural Development (NABARD) as a 'mother' NGO responsible for training other NGOs.

CRTC was the founded by Swami Chinmayananda, a revered Hindu spiritual leader, who chose one of the most depressed areas of the Himachal Pradesh to start a religious center

to practice his beliefs as well as an NGO that would promote sustainable development in the region. Sustainable development of the region, he believed, was only possible if the local women, generally belonging to lower castes and tribes, were able to take charge of their own lives and development. Dr. Kshama Metre, a follower in his religious center and a practicing pediatrician in New Delhi, agreed to take on the leadership of this NGO in 1985.

Starting in a relatively small way with the donation of a few sewing machines, Dr. Metre single-mindedly pursued the vision of empowering the women of the area. From this humble beginning she infused energy and vision to make this organization into a large, well funded NGO currently serving over 27,000 clients, spanning 900 villages, and offering a variety of programs that range from literacy and health services to sanitation, micro-finance and legal aid. Though women are the primary focus, by extending their Practice What You Preach 12

services to include the families of these women where relevant, CRTC serves the entire village community.

In this exploratory study we use a mixed method research technique of in-depth interviews, semi structured interviews and participant observation. This was undertaken at CRTC in March 2003. Both authors conducted interviews with CRTC's employees and Dr. Metre, and did participant observation of the meetings and activities that took place at CRTC for two weeks. This was followed by another visit by one of the authors to tie up some loose ends and obtain missing data. We also observed and documented the various programs at the village level where the women gathered to participate in a variety of programs (such as the micro credit program, plays and puppet shows).

To document levels of empowerment, we drew our data from the employees of the NGO who were responsible for the supervision and delivery of services designed to empower the rural village women. We interviewed supervisors (S) who are program leaders and fieldworkers (F) who went into the villages and worked directly with the village women. We also chose to interview local women not connected to the NGO. We call them recipients (R) given the fact they live in the areas the NGO served and could be potential recipients.

We chose not to interview current recipients of services, as we wanted to establish a baseline of empowerment among the village women from whom the employees and recipients are drawn. As all of the employees (S and F) lived in the neighboring villages before seeking employment at CRTC, we expect they faced similar social environments and were subject to many of the same cultural and political barriers as our R group.. Furthermore, all but three of the supervisors (S) and a quarter of the fieldworkers (F) had Practice What You Preach 13

had some previous engagement with the NGO as clients. Thus, it is not unlikely that the findings on the empowerment indices of the R may reflect those of the employees before coming to the NGO.

The intent of our interviews was to answer the main research questions: Were the women employees who intervened to promote the empowerment of women, themselves empowered? Are the employees' levels of empowerment significantly different from those of the recipients? Furthermore, we wanted to ascertain if there were any differences in the levels of empowerment among employees at different levels of responsibilities and tenure at the NGO.

Two CRTC employees helped us fine tune and translate our instruments designed to measure empowerment. Using these semi-structured instruments, we interviewed all but one (15/16) of the supervisors (S) at CRTC. There was a rotation of fieldworkers (F) coming in to meet with their supervisors at the main office and we were able to interview over half (32/57) of fieldworkers (F); our sample of F is one of convenience. The sample of women recipients (R) was done by two of the NGO employees who visited every third house in the village to identify women who could be potential recipients. This is a systematic sample with a random start. We trained one local woman to undertake these interviews due to our lack of fluency in the local dialect Pahadi. We were able to get a sample of 25 women (R) willing to be interviewed; only two women refused to be interviewed.

To get a better understanding of how the NGO worked and how the employees were selected and trained, we conducted several interviews with the Director, Dr. Kshama Metre. These interviews ranged from short half hour discussions to longer two-  
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hour conversations. Dr. Metre also invited us to visit the weekly meetings held with all staff so we could observe first hand the training and interactions. We attended six meetings in the villages held by staff with the clients to observe their interactions as well.

## Results

Demographic and socio-economic data.

The 72 women (15 S, 32 F, and 25 R) interviewed for our study are all from the district of Sidhbari, Himachal Pradesh. They have lived all of their lives in neighboring villages in a radius of 12 miles and exposed to similar environmental, social, and cultural constraints. They range in age from 21 to 65; most women are married and lived with their husbands and have an average of 2.74 children. Only five women in our study did not live with a spouse; 3 are divorced and two are widowed. The women had an average of 6.13 years of education, not unusual given that the literacy rate in this part of the country is 77% and above the national average (Niranjan, Surender & Rao, 1998). We find that supervisors (S) have an average of 10.27 years of education and field workers (F) and recipients (R) having 8.00 and 1.47 years of education respectively. These differences are significant, but given that NGO employees have to be literate and require some education to do their work, these differences are reasonable. The income variable asked respondents to choose between three classes of income: high, middle, or low. All respondents chose only low (42%) or middle (57%), as expected given the poverty level in this area.

Nearly 89% of the women categorize themselves as low caste or 'Other Backward Classes'. This is a 'catch all' category developed by the Government of India census to include some of the most marginalized caste segments of Indian society. Four of the  
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supervisors belong to the higher castes, as do two of the fieldworkers and one from the group of recipients.

We then compared means of several socio-demographic variables between the three groups: supervisors, fieldworkers, and recipients, to see if they differed significantly on any of the socio-demographic variables and empowerment levels (see Table 2). While they appeared significantly different for all variables except age, the Scheffe Post Hoc test showed that not all the differences were significant. Scheffe Post Hoc tests reveals

that for the variables Education and Income there were no significant differences between the supervisors (S) and fieldworkers (F), but both groups of employees (S & F) were significantly different from the recipients (R). This is explained by the fact that NGO employees (S & F) are more likely to be educated and earn a steady income while the recipient group depends on the local economy. Only six from the recipient group worked outside the home as compared to all the fieldworkers and supervisors.

<<Insert Table 2>>

In this area where alcoholism is rampant, we asked our respondents if they experience problems related to spousal alcohol consumption. We find that nearly half of the women (36/72) have husbands who have problems related to alcohol consumption. This results in domestic violence, the use of household money for alcohol, as well as unemployment and poor health. The least amount of alcoholism was present in the families of fieldworkers (6/32) followed by supervisors (7/15) and recipients (23/25). This begs the question of why highly empowered supervisors had high rates of alcoholism in their families. Perhaps the explanation lies within the much deeper reality of 'doxa'; a term used to describe the taken for granted traditions and culture that are Practice What You Preach 16

embedded so deeply that they are never questioned (Bourdieu 1972). Perhaps this was the case for women who choose to hold on to their alcoholic husbands, as married women enjoy a far higher status in rural Indian society than unmarried or divorced women. Only three of our 72 respondents are divorced. An empowered supervisor is likely to 'keep' her husband so long as he is rendered powerless to abuse her or obstruct her choices. This is illustrated in our story of Murma given later in the paper.

Table 3 shows a clear downward trend in the individual and aggregate scores on the Empowerment Index (E-Index) for the three groups. Comparing the differences in the E-Index across the groups, we find the differences to be significant ( $F = 37.815$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The Scheffe Post Hoc test reveals only significant differences in the E-Index between the recipient (R) group and the two employee groups (S & F) and no significant difference between the S and F groups. This confirms our initial hypothesis that NGO employees whose job is to empower the disenfranchised women do not resort to rhetoric. Their lives embody the various dimensions of empowerment (Table 1) and in this respect are significantly different from that of their clientele; in other words, they walk the talk in their daily lives.

<<Insert table 3>>

To fully understand the influences on the E-Index among all women, we run OLS regression for all three groups (S, F and R) using the independent variables education, income, age, and family structure<sup>3</sup>. Bivariate correlations reveal significant relationships between all independent and dependent variable except 'family structure'. In order to understand the combined effects of variables, we conduct a regression analysis using data

<sup>3</sup> We do not include 'years at NGO' as the R group, a third of the sample, all have a zero value for this variable.

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for all three groups. The regression model in Table 4 shows that 'education', 'age', and 'family structure' are significant explanatory variables of the E-Index. This result also replicates the findings in the literature.

It is interesting to note that 'family structure' is significant only in the regression model; those living in joint families were likely to have higher values on the E-Index. This may suggest that the impact of 'family structure' is not in and of itself sufficient to give a woman a high E-Index. Other factors such as age and education may be influencing the impact of family structure on the E-Index. It is likely that an older woman in a joint family structure with more education is less likely to be dominated by other members of the extended family; however, as there is no statistically significant correlation between 'age' or 'education' and 'family structure', we cannot be sure. This result contradicts our earlier expectation that women will have greater autonomy in a nuclear family structure. An explanation for this may lie in our qualitative findings. In our interviews, we learned that many women who lived in nuclear families also reported living only several houses away from the husband's family, which implies that they were not independent of the influence of their in-laws. This may have distorted our findings..

<<Insert Table 4>>

To understand the impact of the time spent at the NGO on the staff we run a bivariate correlations and an OLS regression for S and F groups that includes the variable 'years in NGO'. Table 5 shows that 'years in the NGO' is the only significant explanatory variable. In both the bivariate and multivariate models, only the independent variable 'years in the NGO' is significant<sup>4</sup>.

<<Insert Table 5>>

<sup>4</sup> E-Index and years of tenure at the NGO (T) has Pearson correlation =0.556 at p<.01  
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Why are traditional factors such as income, education, age, and family structure not significant in explaining empowerment levels for the staff (S and F) of the NGO? From our interview with the Director, we understood that the staff (S and F) was likely selected because of their capacity to take on leadership roles, and this quality may be independent of the traditional factors. The time spent at the NGO exposes them to issues of women's empowerment and gives them opportunities for training and learning successful strategies that they can embrace and adopt into their own lives. Thus, it is not surprising that longer tenure at the NGO can result in higher E-Index values. Hence, it is reasonable that 'years at the NGO' is the only variable that explains the difference in E-Index among the staff.

Qualitative Analysis.

In our interview with Dr. Metre we find that she succeeded despite the lack of trained social workers, because she took this challenge and turned it into an opportunity to hire local labor. She could not import trained employees from neighboring cities for two reasons: the costs were substantial and city folk did not like staying in rural areas for any great length of time. Retention is a major problem given the harsh conditions and lack of amenities.

When faced with a lack of trained employees, Dr. Metre identified some of women clients of her NGO who showed qualities of leadership and worked with them. She counseled this small group of poor and marginalized woman and persuaded them to think that they were entitled to a better life and that acceptance of subjugation is not their karma (destiny). She also made them aware of their legal and constitutional rights. She brought about what she and many of the employees referred to as jagruti or awakening.

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The word jagruti was often repeated in our intensive personal interviews as that moment of epiphany when the women realized that they did not have to accept their low status in society as God given – that they could, and should, fight to better their lot. Alongside this jagruti, she taught them work and business skills.

When these women were confident and self supporting, she trained them to lead programs in the NGO. The new leaders were able to help other women, not only through intervention strategies, but also as role models who would encourage local women to stand up for their rights and take charge of their lives. We noted that in the staff meetings and community meetings, the homegrown supervisors and fieldworkers were quick to share their own experiences and thus were effective role models. They showed village women who came to seek assistance from the NGO that they themselves faced similar circumstances and could rise above them.

Facilitating discussions at meetings of women's groups (Mahila Mandals) in villages where women discuss issues publicly, share stories, and take collective action helped persuade women to undertake behavior changes. This happened in a supportive atmosphere where every individual effort is recognized publicly and applauded. More importantly, the audience identified with leaders who came from similar backgrounds and who were subjected to similar oppression. They represented realistic and powerful examples of change. The vicarious learning that resulted from this role modeling likely motivated behavior change, especially when it was combined with verbal persuasion in a supportive and appreciative environment (Bandura, 1986).

Although role modeling by employees is an effective method of empowering women, many credited success to their deep rooted spiritual beliefs. This, they suggested, Practice What You Preach 20

acts as social glue that connects and engenders trust amongst them and gives support to the overall agenda of self-efficacy. Although the NGO is secular, and our close ended questions did not elicit any information related to religion or spirituality, we were surprised at the frequency with which it was mentioned in our qualitative interviews with Dr. Metre as well as some of the staff members. We identified the element of 'jagruti' that allowed many of the women to make the critical transformation. This finding of spiritual empowerment resulted from our use of a mixed method approach to our research question and added to our findings on the factors facilitating empowerment. This suggests the need for including spiritual capital as a dimension in measuring E-Index in future research. Several authors have written on the relevance of spiritual and religious capital promoting behaviour change (Fowler, 1997; Greive & Bingham, 2001; Strachean, 1982), and others who have stated that religion does not affect woman's autonomy (Jejeebhoy & Sathar, 2001 ).

Our in depth interviews allowed us a glimpse into the manner in which the women had managed to transform their own lives before training to assist other women to bring about similar changes into theirs. Although it is not possible to document all their stories, we give one story to illustrate the salience.

Murma (the name is changed to protect identity) described herself as 'a poor helpless woman with four children. I was often beaten by my alcoholic husband; there was not enough money to buy food or clothing for the children'. Murma eked out a living by begging and borrowing from neighbors and relatives. Lacking education, skills, and

money, Murma had resigned herself to her fate until she heard of the CRTC program. Skeptical that she would be accepted, she ventured to join a women's group (Mahila Practice What You Preach 21

Mandals) run by the NGO and enrolled her children in a children's program. Thereafter she received informal help with her health problems and dealing with her alcoholic husband. She was also provided with literacy classes. She later joined a micro-credit group, received entrepreneurial training, achieved independence from her husband, and managed to bring her children up. Dr. Metre provided Murma her first employment working in the NGO some 18 years ago and today she is a supervisor. Today, she owns a mushroom farm, is economically self-sufficient, and managed to support her errant husband until he died a few years ago. Recently she decided to stand for political leadership, and although she lost in the elections of the local village council, she plans to try again. Murma is now a model of empowerment devoted to helping empower other rural women; she also lobbies for change and liaisons with government.

#### Limitations of the study

It is necessary to point out the caveats to this study due to the small (and unequal) sample sizes of the three groups of respondents and our focus on only one organization.

Foremost the use of one organization, which has unique social, cultural, and geographical context, may make the findings less generalizable. Another possible problem with a cross sectional study like this one may be the selectivity bias, the women choosing to work at the NGO are already stepping out of routine forms of behavior, and such exercise of agency, which is an indicator of empowerment. Furthermore, our sample of fieldworkers (F) is not a systematic random sample, rather one of convenience based on the rotation of fieldworkers through the organization's office in the week the research was carried out.

We did make inquiries to ascertain that office visits were not done in any systematic way, in that fieldworkers were not divided into groups based on projects or Practice What You Preach 22

clientele, but cannot be sure how representative they are of the population of field workers. Similarly, our selection of potential recipients (R) may suffer from a bias due to the sampling technique used and not representative of the general population in the area. As such, our findings are to be treated cautiously and our study remains exploratory; pointing out the need for more systematic research in this area. Given that this study the first of its kind, which looks at empowerment levels of employees in an organization devoted to raising empowerment among its clientele, it generates results worth pursuing. In particular, our finding of the salience of spiritual capital mentioned in our qualitative findings.

#### Conclusion

CRTC, a highly successful NGO, faced a challenge in finding trained staff to achieve its mission of empowering local rural women. This potential disadvantage turned out to be an advantage. By empowering and training local women, CRTC nurtured staff who were highly effective in their work because they were from the same population as the clientele. Many stories documented by Pelletier (2000), and our own qualitative findings from the interviews, give credence to the fact that the women hired as staff were indeed poor and marginalized before coming into contact with the NGO.

All but three of the supervisors had come to the NGO as clients seeking assistance, and today score very high on the E- Index as compared to women (our recipient group).

While it would have been ideal to measure the E- Index before a woman joined the NGO and some years later, it was not possible; and we used the sample from the village (recipients) as a comparison group. However, Pelletier (2000) has documented the stories Practice What You Preach 23

of many of the village women who joined the NGO, and these stories stand testimony to their marginalized status before they joined the NGO.

We answer our main research question whether employees 'walk the talk' in the affirmative. On the possible a possible score of 24 on the E-Index, those employees at the leadership level (supervisors) scored an average of 21.72 (Table 3). We also find that employees' levels of empowerment are indeed significantly different from those of the recipients. In addition, our analysis also indicates that there exist significant differences in levels of empowerment among the two groups of employees at different levels of responsibilities (Table 3). Finally, our statistical analyses show that tenure at the NGO influences the levels of empowerment in the NGO among the employees.

Our analysis of what impacts the E-Index among the staff (supervisors and fieldworkers) showed that the only explanatory variables were tenure at the NGO in both models. This lends credence to the idea that education and income may be enabling factors and not a measure of empowerment as argued by Kishor (2000). However, our analysis with all three groups of women did show the effects of three traditional variables on empowerment. By including potential recipients, who represent just over a third of the sample, and who were generally younger, poorer and less educated, we saw significant impact of education and age in both models. In the regression model we see also see the influence of family structure, suggesting that the family structure is an influential variable when combined with education and age but not in and of itself.

Our qualitative findings show that employees at CRTTC value the role of spiritual capital in bolstering their ability to make changes in their lives. Embracing change that led to personal autonomy and empowerment was difficult; however, their spirituality Practice What You Preach 24

gave them a legitimating power to acknowledge their 'jagruti' (awakening to the truth). This justified their change and made it possible. This theme was evident in all of our interviews with the staff.

Further research is necessary on the spiritual underpinnings we found at CRTTC. If spiritual capital enhanced the behaviors we found, this would give faith based NGOs an edge in working with marginalized women. Perhaps an explicitly shared vision and common values may provide the spiritual capital in the case of secular NGOs. Although we are not certain how spiritual capital plays out, our results indicate a strong likelihood that spiritual capital will enhance the process of empowerment for women.

The practice of hiring local residents as employees makes rural NGOs sustainable. They do not have to rely on importing labor from the cities, which is expensive, and often accompanied with a high turnover rate. Furthermore, using local labor, and in particular women who had experienced subjugation and poverty and had risen above their circumstances, provided the role models necessary to promote behaviour change (Bandura, 1986). The processes used by the NGO through its hiring, training, and empowering process are closely identified with successful ways by which self-efficacy can be acquired by the NGO's clients.

Woolcock (1999) suggests that by paying greater attention to the mechanisms shaping institutional success, the factors that contribute to success can be discovered and strategies deliberately nurtured. With this in mind, we ask what lessons we can draw from the experiences of CRTC that can be applied to other rural NGOs.

CRTC depended on the local population for its employees who were as vulnerable to social pressures and are often as marginalized as their clients. However, CRTC Practice What You Preach 25

succeeded despite having homegrown local employees. Fieldworkers and supervisors employed by CRTC were from the same milieu as the marginalized women they served. The experience of CRTC suggests that employees can be found among the clientele. By carefully identifying women who showed leadership potential they can be trained to take on positions of responsibility. Such potential leaders need to be identified early on with this goal in mind. This also results in a management style that is grounded in the reality of the experiences lived by the employees and clientele alike. The regular staff meetings are a venue where time is set aside to celebrate the efforts of those trying to change their own lives and those of others. This practice not only allows for sharing of successful indigenous practices with others, but nurtures an environment that celebrates risk-taking thereby promoting change.

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Table 1. Empowerment Measures

1. Personal Autonomy Index Generally(1) Occasionally (1/2) Never (0)
Can you do the following without seeking permission from your husband?
Visit respondent's parental home

Visit a hospital or clinic
Visit the village market
Help a relative with money
Set money aside for respondents' personal use
2. Family Decision Making Index Wife Alone (1) Joint Decision (1/2) Husband Alone (0)
Who in your home makes decisions on the following?
Children's education in school
Family planning
Family day-to-day expenditures
Going outside of home as a family
Seeking help, financial, or other
Entertaining guests
Buying respondent's favorite items (food, clothing etc)
3. Domestic Consultation Index Generally(1) Occasionally (1/2) Never (0)
Does your husband consult with you when:
Buying household furniture and utensils
Purchasing land for home or business
Spending for the education of children
Purchasing medical treatment for the family
Purchasing respondent's clothes
Purchasing children's clothes
Purchasing daily food
4. Political index Generally(1) Occasionally (1/2) Never (0)
Do you vote according to own mind
Are you aware of political issues in your community?
Do you participate in any public protest?
Do you campaign politically for candidates or causes?
Have you stood for political office?

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Table 2. Comparison of Means of Socio Economic Data and Empowerment Index

Variable	Supervisor	Field-worker	Recipients	ANOVA F Test (3 groups)	T-Test for S and F groups
Age	40	38.94	36.64	.818	.669
# of Kids	3	2	3	5.117*	.048*
Income class	1.79	1.65	1.32	5.348*	.357
Years of Education	10.27	8.00	1.40	51.380**	.032*

Years in NGO	10.53	6.40	N/a	N/a	.008**
Aggregate E- Index	21.72	17.47	9.40	37.815**	.007**

• P< 0.05 , \*\* p< 0.01

Table 3. Empowerment Indexes for Supervisors, Fieldworkers, and Recipients.

Group	Personal Autonomy	Family Decision-Making	Domestic Consultation	Political Autonomy	Aggregate E-Index **
Supervisors	5.73	5.27	5.23	5.49	21.72
Fieldworkers	4.33	4.33	4.36	4.45	17.47
Recipients	3.02	3.02	2.54	0.82	9.40
All groups	4.17	4.07	3.91	3.41	15.55

\*\* F = 37.815 and p<.001.

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Table 4. Regression Coefficients [Supervisors, Field workers and Recipients n = 72]

Dependent Variable: E- Index	Standard Error	Standardized $\beta$ Coefficient	t- Value	p Significance
Constant		2.837	-1.075	.286
Education	.141	.502	5.031	.000***
Income Class	1.341	-.034	-.332	.741 NS
Age	.067	.477	5.175	.000***
Family Structure	1.321	.275	2.872	.005**

R<sup>2</sup> = .498 \*\*\* p< 0.001, \*\* p< 0.01

Table 5. Regression Coefficients [Supervisors and Field workers n = 47 ]

Dependent Variable: E- Index	Standard Error	Standardized $\beta$ Coefficient	t- Value	p Significance
Constant		3.690	2.617	.013
Education	.212	.119	.834	.409
Income Class	1.424	-.111	-.800	.429
Age	.071	.201	1.408	.167
Family Structure	1.269	.246	1.848	.072
Years in NGO	.127	.522	3.873	.000 ***

R<sup>2</sup> = .413 \*\*\* p< 0.001, \*\* p< 0.01

